

THE ALEXANDER WILSON MEMORIAL IN INDIANA

BY S. E. PERKINS III

Hidden for decades in the depths of a wooded ravine on the edge of a lapping brook; shaded both morning and evening by high hills that have been clothed with a delightful primeval forest of hardwoods and have been carpeted for ages with myriads of wild flowers, some of which, like the myrtle, furnish greenery the year round, stands vertically a five-foot pillar of native stone, unhewn except for a legend roughly carved thereon by one who was but an amateur chiselman. Though this legend is almost worn away, by chalking the shallow markings a profile of Wilson with long hair was brought out in life size near the top on the west side. Just below this were the initials, A. W. These letters were made with sweeping curves and were about four inches in height. About five inches below them was the word "Died" on somewhat smaller scale followed, near the bottom of the stone, by the date "1813". All lines of chiseling appeared to have been made with a rounded base chisel and not a pointed one.

Encircling and protecting this block of stone is an iron picket fence some four feet tall surrounding a space with a diameter of fifteen or eighteen feet. Both shaft and fence bear evidence of venerable age. The whole stands far back from even present day roads, near the picturesque entrance to Donaldson's Cave and away from the regular drives in what is now Spring Mill State Park near Mitchell, Indiana. The tract about it was formerly the "Beautiful Shawnee" and afterwards, Donaldson's Woods. Within the enclosure is a painted sign which recites:

IN MEMORY OF
ALEXANDER WILSON
FATHER OF AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY.
THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY
GEORGE DONALDSON
HIS FELLOW TOWNSMAN.

The genius for whom this stone was placed had left Scotland and the weaver's trade to round out in America a studious career. Though he arrived here with little of this world's goods, he first earned his living at teaching English. Soon his ambition to become a naturalist irresistibly asserted itself and untiringly he studied botanical forms and birds. He traveled far and wide in eastern United States between 1808 and 1813. To fix with permanency his knowledge, he painted the wild life specimens he saw afield. Thus he attracted the attention

of men of science. He, himself, engraved in 1805 some of the plates from which his "American Ornithology" pages were struck. This completed work embraced 276 species of birds with descriptions of them, which he offered for sale at \$120.00 per set.

He has left some very creditable poems. In brief, this gentleman, by one and all of these varied accomplishments, left a deep imprint upon the mind and heart of George Donaldson.

It seems that in September, 1865, George Donaldson, a Scotsman, polite and genteel, after extensive travels, wandered into the hills of Marion Township, Lawrence County, Indiana, where the unusual beauty of his surroundings captivated him. He approached James C. Lynn, a pioneer in those parts, asking to purchase of him 101 acres. Upon his acquiring the desired ground he named it "Beautiful Shawnee" as it



FIG. 5. Location of the Alexander Wilson monument in Indiana.



FIG. 6. Detail of carving on the face of the monument.

was reported to have been a camp of that Indian tribe. In the woodland he at once built a home and proceeded to add to his knowledge of the plant and animal life to be found upon his purchase. As he came to Indiana with a love for wild life, largely the result of the influence of Alexander Wilson, it is only natural that he should have, upon settling down there, promulgated edicts to his caretaker not to permit a snake to be killed, a butterfly to be caught, or a flower or twig to be broken within his domain. For such an attitude toward nature he became known as an eccentric. Today he would be called a conservationist. Here this kind soul resided, regularly walking to his Presbyterian Church, encouraging relatives from far distances to become his guests often for as long as a year at a time. Donaldson obtained all that was to be had from his pleasant life of leisure until 1871 when he left Indiana and settled in the State of Alabama.

There is not much doubt that his admiration for Alexander Wilson took concrete form in the erection of this monument in 1866, the cen-

tenary of the birth of the now celebrated naturalist, now generously and generally known as "The Father of American Ornithology". Wilson had been born in Paisley, Scotland, and died at forty-seven years of age in 1813, two years after Donaldson was born. Some forty years after the demise of Wilson, his influence on Donaldson was yet strong. He was still realizing that his joy in outdoor history of bird and beast was brought to fruition through Wilson's arguments expressed while afield: "From these barren and musty records, the author of the present work has a thousand times turned with a delight bordering on adoration, to the magnificent repository of the woods and fields—the *Grand Aviary of Nature*. In this divine school he has studied from no vulgar *copy*; but from the works of the GREAT MASTER OF CREATION himself; and has read with rapture the lessons of his



FIG. 7. The Alexander Wilson monument in Indiana, with fence enclosure.

wisdom, his goodness and his love, in the conformation, the habitudes, melody and migrations of this beautiful portion of the work of his hands. To communicate as correct ideas of these as his feeble powers were capable of, and thus, from objects, that, in our rural walks, almost everywhere present themselves, to deduce not only amusement and instruction, but the highest incitements to virtue and piety, have been the author's most anxious and ardent wish." . . .

"... For to me it appears that, of all inferior creatures, Heaven seems to have intended birds as the most cheerful associates of man;

to soothe and exhilarate him in his labors by their varied melody, of which no other creature, but man, is capable; to prevent the increase of those supernumerary hosts of insects that would soon consume the products of his industry: to glean up the refuse of his fields, 'that nothing be lost,' . . ."

I can see Donaldson in my mind's eye, winding through the valley, delighting in its flowers and its bird life, enjoying its butterflies and beetles, and then all at once realizing that it was through Alexander Wilson that this appreciation of such phenomena had been engendered. What he would have missed, thought he, in culture, in understanding, in incentive to seek knowledge of the wild had this love of the outdoors not been his. Should he not in some way honor the memory of his mentor? Could he labor to attest his gratitude to Wilson, then gone to his reward? He would leave a monument in the place that brought him the greatest opportunity to learn of the things he had been inspired to ferret out. The ravine, where stands the shaft, was doubtless chosen thus.

Would that Donaldson had seen fit to remain for the remainder of his long life within the borders of our State. He did not, however. He came to feel that he would, some day, launch out again to learn of other lands, so he never even became a legal citizen of the United States. He had the spirit of a rover and after travels to other foreign lands returned to Ayrshire in his homeland for his last year of life. In September, 1898, he breathed his last and is honored by burial in the Old Necropolis at Glasgow, near where he was born.

Should not our State feel proud that a seventy-year-old monument to the self-taught, gifted Alexander Wilson (perhaps the earliest memorial to be erected in his honor in this whole country) continues to grace one of our most beautiful outdoor temples! It represents a most sincere tribute indeed to Wilson, for no blare of trumpets heralded its dedication, if any there was. It was not erected at a crossroads to conspicuously reflect more credit upon its maker than upon its subject. This was at the time a true, personal tribute. Donaldson's admiration brought him satisfaction through his visits to it where he could in quiet think upon the talents and character of Alexander Wilson, which had been such a stimulus to his own activities. We can not but feel that was the real purpose of the shaft, its conception and its execution.

Donaldson, as did John Lusk in saving the trees in what is now Turkey Run State Park, preserved in pristine wildness with its silva, flora, and fauna, an area out of which has been carved a park of rare beauty. Both these men deserve our unstinted praise.

Now, with the opportunity to visit this monument in the grand park at Spring Mill, we, the public, are pleased to have a share in attesting our admiration for both the nature-loving men, Donaldson and Wilson, whose names are linked with this unique tribute in stone.

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

THE 1937 WATERFOWL SEASON IN THE PRINCE ALBERT DISTRICT, CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN.

BY O. C. FURNISS

The 1937 waterfowl season in the Prince Albert district has been far less favorable than those of former seasons. A remarkable decline in the number of broods has taken place even though conditions earlier in the year indicated that a successful season could be expected. Water levels reached their lowest in the fifteen years of observations carried on by the writer and in the lifetime experience of the oldest settlers.

The information in this paper is based on observations carried on during the migration, breeding, and post-breeding seasons on eighty-three sloughs and potholes south of the city. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, but may serve to show the influence of certain factors and the general trend of conditions as they exist in this area.

LOCALITY

The Prince Albert district is on the dividing line between the typical Canadian and Transition Life Zones; and consists of rolling well-wooded country, the characteristic trees being aspens and willows, with numerous small sloughs and potholes. It is adapted to mixed farming and has been settled for the past fifty years. The area has a creek flowing through the middle of it which helped to maintain the level of some of the sloughs much longer than would otherwise have been the case. The locality may be considered as being very favorable for breeding waterfowl.

WATER LEVELS

The water levels in the sloughs in this area depend for the maintenance of their levels upon spring run-off. The amount of water received from rainfall in the summer season does not make up for that lost by evaporation, a poor spring run-off lowers the levels. There has been a tendency toward lower levels for several seasons in the sloughs studied in this paper, but no sudden lowering was noted until the summer of 1936. The first survey of broods was made in 1934 when the area was mapped and the work started; levels at that time